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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000360

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STATE FOR EUR/NCE, PM/RSAT FOR DOWLEY

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PL](#) [EZ](#) [UK](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC AND MISSILE DEFENSE: SUPPORTIVE,  
BUT ONLY AFTER THE ELECTION

REF: A. STATE 44145

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 283

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons  
1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The Czech Republic may be a good candidate to host ground-based ballistic missile defense (BMD) interceptors and/or a BMD radar. However, Czech involvement in the project will be contingent on careful handling of the issue in the domestic political arena. The too-close-to-call June 2-3 parliamentary elections loom, and politicians continue to use every available divisive issue for their advantage. Bilateral missile defense talks at the political level before June would further raise the profile of BMD in the Czech Republic, and would likely unleash negative statements on BMD that would be hard to reverse. Work at the technical level, such as visits here by survey teams or travel of a Czech technical expert to Washington, should present no problem. Most post-election coalition scenarios would be supportive of BMD in the Czech Republic and, if properly packaged, there would not likely be strong public opposition. End Summary.

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CZECH SUPPORTERS OF BMD WERE WILLING TO  
RISK TALKS BEFORE JUNE  
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[1](#)2. (S) Poloff and DATT March 22 delivered Ref A demarche on BMD to Vaclav Cejka, Acting Director of the MOD's Defense Policy and Strategy Division. That meeting followed March 14th's more informal discussion of the issue between the Ambassador and Defense Minister Kuehnle (reported Ref B). Cejka, echoing his Defense Minister, said that a potential visit by ASD Peter Flory to the Czech Republic in advance of the elections could be risky, but the Ministry of Defense would be prepared to host the visit, perhaps under the guise of "broad political-military discussions." This answer was relayed to Washington but the unavailability of the exact date of the Flory visit meant the meeting was not immediately scheduled with the Czechs. Before a date could be finalized, a new wave of media reporting on the BMD in the national and international press raised the issue's profile in the Czech Republic. Post understands that during this timeframe Petr Kolar, the Czech Ambassador to the United States, visited ASD Flory and it was agreed the Czech Republic would not host BMD

discussions before the June elections. Post has learned from the MFA that Ambassador Kolar's action on the BMD issue was his own initiative. Although he acted without instruction, his Ministry believes his message was consistent with current thinking in the GOCR on BMD.

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A DIVISIVE ELECTION, BUT A MEETING  
OF MINDS ABOUT THE BEST TIMING FOR BMD TALKS  
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13. (S) Throughout March and April Emboffs have been able to use the appearance of BMD in the Czech press to initiate conversations with a range of officials on the question of Missile Defense in the Czech Republic. The responses are remarkably similar.

-- MOD: As reported ref B, Defense Minister Kuehnl cautioned that the pre-election period was a politically delicate time for any work that might hit the press. He warned that (highl-pragmatic) Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek could distance himself from missile defense if it were to become an electoral liability. Kuehnl said the Ministry of Defense is interested in further talks but any work on the issue should not/not be made public before the election. He suggested that any talks on missile defense be packaged as part of wider discussions on political and military matters. Kuehnl said that he saw no problem with private briefings to NATO allies or Russia on missile defense.

-- MFA: MFA officials likewise agree that the pre-election period presents a political environment that is more dangerous to BMD in the Czech Republic than would normally be the case. Given the controversial nature of BMD, they could

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envisage opposition politicians using the program to attack the government. Looking ahead, a sense of Czech-US partnership on the program would be crucial. MFA contacts said the Czechs' history of hosting Soviet missiles made this a more sensitive issue in the minds of the Czech electorate than might otherwise be expected.

-- Parliament: Radim Turek, a CSSD member of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, believed that, with proper political handling, BMD could come to the Czech Republic under any new government, whatever its political makeup (Note: Turek is personally agnostic on BMD coming to the Czech Republic). The key, he said, would be how the new Government sold the project to the Parliament. Politicians would need something tangible to point at, to show the benefits to the Czech Republic for hosting BMD. Enhanced security from overseas missile threats would not be a successful selling point. The Czech populace, Turek said, was not convinced that there could be a potential missile threat to their country. BMD, he said, would be seen as having the opposite effect, making the Czech Republic more of a target than it is now. Turek believed that a focus on jobs, economic investment, or scientific or technical involvement, or military partnership would be much more effective selling points for BMD.

-- The Prime Minister's Office: Almost nobody in the MOD, the MFA, or the Parliament believes that engaging the Prime Minister on BMD before the election would help the project. MP Turek alleged the Prime Minister had polled the issue and determined voters would not give him increased support if he came out in favor of BMD. Certain members of the foreign policy community in Prague caution that the issue of BMD, if raised, must only be discussed directly with the PM himself. They allege that the PM's national security advisors would present the information to him in a manner that would guarantee his opposition (Note: Post's interactions on other issues with some of the PM's advisors lead us to believe that there is truth to these allegations). The Prime Minister's isolation from real information on BMD negotiations is

evident. In response to a reporter's question Paroubek recently said he had not heard the Czech Republic, Poland and the UK were candidates for a BMD site, and called media reporting on the issue "political science fiction."

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COMMENT: WE SHOULD ENGAGE WITH THE  
CZECHS ON BMD SOON AFTER THE ELECTIONS  
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14. (S) There is no shortage of supporters for BMD within the national security apparatus of the Czech Republic. However almost all are agreed that nothing can happen at the political level before June. The key question will be whether BMD supporters can gain the necessary political traction with the new government and new Parliament after the June elections.

15. (S) Most mainstream Czech parties agree on the general course of their foreign policy, and are likely to come out in support of BMD. The exception is the Communist party, which would always vote against BMD. Naturally, the composition of the new government will be a key factor. A grand coalition between ODS and CSSD would be likely to welcome BMD to the Czech Republic if tangible benefits such as jobs or economic advantages could be raised in Parliament. A center-right ODS-KDU-Green coalition government would likely be more forward leaning on BMD. In contrast, a minority CSSD government would be a harder sell, both because it would focus more on domestic economic benefits and because it would need to forge common ground with the ODS to get the measure passed. Even in such circumstances we believe that BMD would have a reasonable chance of being successful.

16. (S) While a political discussion will need to wait for a new government, there is no reason to avoid working level contacts. Officials at both MFA and MOD have told us that technical visits -- whether site survey teams coming to the CR, or expert Czech officials visiting Washington -- are possible in the pre-election period, so long as they remain low-profile.

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17. (S) We encourage a continuing dialogue with Czech officials on missile defense, including at the planned bilateral pol-mil talks in Prague April 18-19. One part of this should be briefing the Czechs on our discussions with others (notably the Russians), so that they Czechs are prepared to respond in a coordinated fashion if they are approached by the Russians or others.  
CABANISS